



Universal public education is the bedrock of our democracy and is a fundamental right that provides each child the opportunity to reach that child's potential. Lawrence Public Schools recognizes the importance of making and supporting significant shifts in mindset and practice to provide and sustain equitable outcomes for all students. We aim to eliminate the opportunity gap. Children, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, and/or other minoritized identities, should be able to freely access the resources and supports necessary to reach their fullest potential. Lawrence Public Schools is committed to continuous academic growth and high achievement for students of all races, backgrounds, and abilities so that students graduate on time prepared for success in college and careers.

KEY PRIORITIES FOR THE 2026 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Lawrence Public Schools urges legislators to prioritize the following policies:

- *Fully fund special education as required by current state law. See K.S.A 72-3422. Special education funding must cover the actual cost of providing necessary services to each and every one of our students with an IEP. With a significant state budget surplus, the continued refusal by the Kansas Legislature to pay for the actual services students need to succeed is a moral, ethical, and policymaking failure by our current legislative leadership.*
- *Increase base state aid per pupil to a level that closes the 25% educator pay gap and allows districts to pay competitive wages to support staff. Again, school funding must be tied to the actual, inflation-adjusted costs needed to achieve state requirements for student achievement.*
- *Reject all proposals to spend public tax dollars on private education, whether through vouchers, ESAs, tuition tax credits, or other direct or indirect vehicles that redirect state general fund dollars to support private or parochial schools.*
- *Value the instructional expertise of educators and the governance expertise of district leaders by prioritizing and protecting local control. Reject calls to proscribe management and teaching practices and procedures in statute. Flexibility at the district level to respond to local circumstances and implement best practices based on those circumstances is essential to achieving the outcomes our educational leaders expect, and our students and families deserve.*
- *Broadly embrace academic freedom and the teaching of critical thinking skills in public schools by rejecting calls to limit what teachers can teach, what materials they can use to teach, and the methods that professional educators can use to support students. This freedom is integral to supporting and maintaining the district's strong relationships with parents as partners in their children's education.*
- *Return local control to elected boards of education and their voters to collect data to support the learning needs of students in our community.*
- *Repeal and reject discriminatory statutes that target and discriminate against students and staff and that compromise their safety, dignity, and individual integrity.*
- *Provide universal meals free to all students. Reducing administrative burdens like individual applications for free and reduced meals ensures students do not go hungry and are better prepared to learn.*



LAWRENCE
Public Schools
USD 497 2026 Legislative Priorities

USD 497's 2026 legislative priorities align with our community's vision for our schools, as outlined in the USD 497 Strategic Plan:

Goal 1: Cohesive Curriculum

To achieve this strategic goal, Lawrence Public Schools requests that the Kansas Legislature:

- Increase funding to support personalized educational experiences for each student, including Individual Plans of Study, Work-Based Learning, and Career and Technical Education.
- Expand access to affordable broadband service for all Kansas students, families, and schools.
- Expand access to postsecondary education in high school with clear expectations for Kansas Board of Regents schools to work collaboratively with local boards of education to improve postsecondary success.
- Respect that a district's curriculum shall be established by the local board of education, not by state statute.
- Reject proposals that would limit the implementation of the State Board of Education's Kansas Can vision, the district accreditation process, and the Kansas College and Career Ready Standards.
- Maximize local flexibility in using funds; repeal mandatory transfers from local property tax dollars to restricted funds, and repeal or modify the "65 percent for instruction" statutory goal that excludes services and activities that support student learning from inclusion as instructional expenses.

Goal 2: Student-Centered Learning

To achieve this strategic goal, Lawrence Public Schools requests that the Kansas Legislature:

- Fully fund the actual costs of providing necessary special education services. State law requires the legislature to fund 92% of these additional ("excess") costs. Current funding only pays for just over 70% of these excess costs, in violation of state law. This chronic underfunding caused USD 497 to divert over \$14 million last school year from the district's general fund and local property tax dollars to cover the shortfall in state funding for special education services.
- Provide stable, reliable, adequate, and equitable funding of the current school finance formula, as approved by the Gannon court, and support this funding with tax policy that will generate revenue sufficient to fully fund the school finance formula, including adjustments for inflation, for current and future generations of Kansas students.
- Increase funding for school- and community-based mental health services, including funding for additional school counselors, social workers, and psychologists to address the social and emotional needs of the entire student population.
- Expand funding for universal preschool and before- and after-school programs.
- Continue to provide at-risk funding necessary to meet the diverse needs of students, .

Goal 3: Safe & Supportive Schools



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To achieve this strategic goal, Lawrence Public Schools requests that the Kansas Legislature:

- Fund transportation for students living less than 2.5 miles from their assigned school. We assert that a reasonable commute for a child on foot is far less than 2.5 miles.
- Support policies and processes that allow districts to analyze policy decisions and legislation at all levels for bias and equity.
- Support equal rights, tribal sovereignty, and equity of opportunity to all persons regardless of race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, or ethnicity. We support programs that celebrate diversity and honor the achievements of all Kansans.
- Support red flag laws and firearm safety proposals, such as requiring secure storage and closing the background check loophole. Schools cannot carry the burden of student safety on their own; community policies must address the presence of and access to deadly weapons within the community.
- Improve student wellness and safety so that students are ready and able to access teaching and learning by:
 - Providing state funding for vision, dental, and other school-based health screenings for students in Pre-K through 12.
 - Expanding KanCare (Medicaid) under the Affordable Care Act.
 - Raising the age for purchase and possession of tobacco and nicotine products to 21 (Tobacco 21 proposals).
 - Returning the Communities that Care and other student surveys and health and safety screening tools to opt-out rather than opt-in so that the district can have more complete and accurate data to direct health, wellness, and student safety initiatives.
- Increase funding and community partnerships to meet the mental health needs of students and staff.

Goal 4: Effective Employees

To achieve this strategic goal, Lawrence Public Schools requests that the Kansas Legislature:

- Prioritize and value the teaching profession and create strong and supportive pathways to the profession through policy and practice, while maintaining professional licensing and certification standards.
- Acknowledge that the educator recruitment and retention crisis is primarily attributable to staff pay and the lack of respect and support for educators expressed by state and community leaders.
- Increase base state aid per pupil to close the 25% educator pay gap and to pay competitive wages to support staff. Likewise, additional funding would enable districts to reduce large class sizes, which contribute to increased workload stressors.
- Support school districts in exploring new and innovative ways to recruit and address staff shortages, especially in difficult-to-fill areas such as special education, including the expansion of the Grow Your Own programs across the state, including incentives for GYO graduates who take positions at "hard-to-staff" schools. In addition, increase and fund pathways for individuals employed in school districts.



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- *Support a long-term, sustained commitment to state funding for KPERs, including changes to make KPERs a more attractive retirement program to support the recruitment and retention of highly qualified teachers, administrators, and support staff.*
- *Support reinstating the previous working after retirement laws to allow KPERs retired staff to continue working without penalty.*

Goal 5: Data-Informed Decisions

To achieve this strategic goal, Lawrence Public Schools requests that the Kansas Legislature:

- *Improve collaboration across agencies to support educational outcomes for the growing numbers of students in foster care, juvenile detention, and experiencing homelessness.*
- *Support local authority to administer nonacademic tests, questionnaires, surveys, and exams and prioritize student safety if a student is experiencing suicidal ideations.*
- *Support the incorporation of the science of toxic stress and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) into federal, state, and local policies and programs.*
- *Eliminate the use of Native American mascots, imagery, and names by educational institutions and sports teams unless used by a tribal school or educational institution.*

Good Governance Policies and Practices

These strategic goals require that the Legislature support and encourage local control and good board governance practices. To those ends, the board of education of Lawrence Public Schools requests that the Kansas Legislature:

- *Support having school board members elected in non-partisan elections held in the spring.*
- *Support the role of an independent judiciary in enforcing constitutional provisions and oppose either changing the selection process for judges or limiting the ability of the courts to enforce these provisions, which would weaken the separation of powers in Kansas.*
- *Support the general supervision of public schools under the State Board of Education, including setting standards for accreditation, learning standards, graduation, and licensure.*
- *Support continued management of public schools under local boards of education, including setting curriculum, staffing, financial management, and policies so that such schools can progress and meet State Board standards.*
- *Support the district's development and implementation of system-wide equity and justice strategies.*
- *Reject legislation that micromanages local boards' operations and governance practices, or that imposes additional requirements or restrictions on boards of education that are different from those applied to other units of local government.*